



Dana E. Blackwell
Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

COMMISSIONERS:
CAROL O. BIONDI, VICE CHAIR
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HELEN A. KLEINBERG
DAISY MA, VICE CHAIR
DR. LA-DORIS MCCLANEY
SANDRA RUDNICK
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS, CHAIR

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **March 21, 2005**, in room 140 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi
Joyce Fahey
Helen Kleinberg
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Adelina Sorkin
Dr. Harriette Williams

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Patricia Curry
Daisy Ma
Sandra Rudnick

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the March 21, 2005 meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes for the March 7, 2005 general meeting were unanimously approved with amendments.

CHAIR'S REPORT:

- Proposition 63 Recommendations: Commission members reviewed a draft letter to the Board of Supervisors (BOS). The letter was held over until the next general meeting, with a request by the Executive Director for Commission members to provide her with input into the recommendations in a timely manner.
- Foster Care Awareness: Miriam Krinsky, Children's Law Center Los Angeles, provided the Commission with a brief report on the key events taking place during the Third Annual Foster Care Awareness Campaign during the month of May. Commission members provided Ms. Krinsky with suggestions on how to expand awareness of the events and commended her for all of her efforts.

APPRECIATION DAY:

- Upon her retirement after 31 years of dedicated county service and friendship to the Commission, Chair Williams, on behalf of the Commission, presented Linda Tarnoff, Deputy 4th District, with a plaque recognizing and honoring her advocacy and accomplishments on behalf of children and families.
- Upon his retirement, after 34 years of service on behalf of children and families in Los Angeles County, Chair Williams, on behalf of the Commission, presented Dr. Russ Carr, Deputy Director DCFS, with a plaque recognizing and honoring all of his accomplishments while working with both the Probation Department and especially with the DCFS.

OLD BUSINESS

Relative Care Permanency Report Update: Chair Williams explained that this presentation, as well as the Permanency presentation, serves as the first quarterly update on the implementation of the recommendations contained within each of the respective reports. The Relative Care update presentation was broken into five separate sections.

1. Data: Laura Shotzbarger, DCFS, provide updated statistical information on the status of the ASFA assessment process. In March 2004 an ASFA assessment unit was developed to conduct the initial assessments for perspective relative care providers for the entire Department. Since that time, through January 2005, the unit has received 3,803 referrals, with 3,214 completed and 589 pending. Of those assessments only 114 denials have been issued. Ms. Shotzbarger provided the Commission with a breakdown of denial justifications. She believes that this is a remarkable statistic when considering the number of completed assessments. Criminal history makes up the majority of the denials issued at 27%, followed closely by incomplete Live Scans at 26% and facility issues at 22%. She stated that the Department is working diligently to ensure that its evaluation process for criminal exemptions mirrors that of Community Care Licensing as instructed by CDSS.

Ms. Shotzbarger reminded the Commission that during summer 2004 the Department hired approximately 70 as needed staff to assist in addressing its backlog of annual relative care ASFA reassessments. To date the ASFA unit has completed 100% of the backlogged reassessments and is now working on the current reassessments due. Less than 10% of those homes were denied approval. She stated that 95% of the denials were based on criminal background issues. She believes that the small amount of denials reflects the Department's commitment to families as they are helping to remove the barriers toward approval. Since

Fiscal Year 2001-02 through Fiscal Year 2003-04, the Department has spent \$1,414,822 on goods and services to ensure assessment approval.

Ms. Shotzbarger indicated that the ASFA unit will be merging with the Kinship division to provide a more holistic support approach to working with relatives. She recommended that relative assessment and support staff should be located in every regional office or Kinship Resource Center and that the appropriate number of clerical staff should be allocated to assist staff performing the assessments.

Commissioner Fahey asked Ms. Shotzbarger to clarify under what circumstances a criminal exemption is appropriate. Ms. Shotzbarger responded that there are guidelines that specify when an offense is exemptible. The criteria includes the number of offenses, passage of time since last offense, type of offense and efforts toward rehabilitation. The placement worker and the assessment worker initiate the exemption process.

Commissioner Kleinberg asked who is responsible to assess the mental and physical health and ability of the potential caregiver. Ms. Shotzbarger stated that the assessment provides guidelines to assess the ability and willingness of the relative to provide care. In addition, she indicated that it should also be an ongoing evaluation by the CSW. Commissioner Kleinberg expressed her concern as to whether CSWs are trained to make appropriate evaluations and assessments in this area.

2. Training: Madeline Jackson, DCFS, stated that the Inter-University Consortium (IUC) and The Community College Foundation (TCCF) are working together to provide training for Department staff in an effort to promote cultural change as it relates to their perceptions of relatives and the type of support they need. Training focuses on partnership, collaboration and the four phases of kinship care. A relative, a CSW, a member of TCCF and Dr. Eileen Pastourz make up the training panel. The training began in January of this year. Ms Jackson stated that central themes have emerged from the training evaluations that indicate a positive response to and better understanding of kinship issues and services.

Delia Johnson, TCCF, stated that there are 15 community colleges throughout the county and four community sites which offer the Kinship Education, Preparation and Support Program (KEPS). The addition of the community sites was the result of feedback from focus groups TCCF conducted and from dialogue with community partners who indicated their desire to join in this effort. She expressed her enthusiasm in participating in the training with the CSWs as she believes it has improved their ability to work with relative providers.

Adrienne Ann Mullen, Chancellor's Office, stated that the Foster and Kinship Care Education (FKCE) program in the county is conducted at 17 colleges and 19 sites throughout the county. Each college is required to provide an enhanced kinship orientation prior to a KEPS module regardless of whether one takes place at their site or not. In addition to the orientation, the FKCE program provides classes to kinship and resource families. A new training, Traditions of Caring, will begin in spring 2006. The intent of the training is to facilitate interaction and the sharing of experiences between care providers. It is targeted toward non-DCFS care

providers and the family that has completed KEPS. Training on D and F rates and Kin-GAP is also provided.

Commissioner Kleinberg asked how much of the KEPS and FKCE training focuses on family reunification and visitation. Ms. Mullen stated that FKCE does include training on permanency and reunification. The KEPS curriculum has six hours of the 36 program hours dedicated to permanency. TCCF is up-grading the curriculum and it will have a more intense focus on permanency. While no concentrated effort has been made with respect to include visitation in their training efforts, Ms. Johnson indicated her hope that TCCF will stay in step with Department initiatives. Ms. Jackson indicated that the Department offers training on interaction with birth parents that includes visitation. Commissioner Kleinberg expressed her strong feelings about the need for training and focus on visitation if the Department is going to be successful in family reunification adding that this issue is especially critical for relative providers.

Vice Chair Biondi questioned whether an examination takes place to understand why some providers and advocates do not complete KEPS. Ms. Johnson stated that TCCF is now examining that issue and indicated that child care seems to be the biggest obstacle to attending the classes.

3. Kin-GAP Report: Commissioner Sorkin presented the data portion of the report. Commissioner Sorkin explained that the committee surveyed Kin-GAP recipients about their experience and satisfaction with the program. Surveys, in English and Spanish, were mailed to 7,741 Kin-GAP recipients. A total of 2,323 responses were received. Commissioner Sorkin indicated that the survey results showed that 67% of the respondents were generally satisfied with the program. However, one-third of the respondents did not feel strongly enough about the program to endorse it. Commissioner Sorkin stated that 57% of the youth in the program are ages 14 and older. She stated that the Department must pay closer attention to this population in providing them with ILP services. Overall, she believes that the findings of the report mirror those of the Commission's original Relative Care Task Force findings.

Jacquie Dolan acknowledged the efforts of the stakeholders who participated on this committee and provided a background as to why an evaluation of the Kin-GAP program was undertaken. Ms. Dolan stated that in addition to surveying the program recipients, the committee also conducted a legislative and policy analysis of the program. As a result of the entire program evaluation, the sub-committee made six recommendations for the programs on-going improvement. Recommendations focused on training, communication, access to and development of services, and evaluation.

Ms. Dolan acknowledged that in addition to these recommendations, the committee, in concert with the Department, developed recommendations to improve the Department's policy on Kin-GAP. However, these recommendations were inadvertently left out of the report. **The Commission approved the report as submitted and will take up the policy recommendations at a future meeting.**

4. Kinship Division: Deputy Carr announced that Michael Gray, Division Chief, will be the interim Division Chief for the new Kinship Support Division, until a permanent Division Chief is selected. Deputy Carr provided the Commission with an update on the development of the division. The Kinship Support Division is to merge all of the functions and processes that affect relatives into one division in the Department: support, ASFA and Live Scan. A steering committee is being formed to develop and implement a successful division. Issues to be examined include outcomes, training, policy, staffing, need, and resource development. Chair Williams expressed her satisfaction that a division for kinship providers is being implemented in the Department. Commissioner Kleinberg questioned whether the division will be regionalized. Mr. Gray responded in the affirmative. An organizational chart will be made public within the near future. Commissioner Kleinberg questioned the integration of all of the service initiatives underway at the Department, i.e.: POE, Concurrent Planning, and Kinship Services. Mr. Gray stated that he has submitted a plan to the Department's executive team for integration of these very services. Commissioner Kleinberg asked that the Department provide a presentation to the Commission when that plan has been finalized.
5. Kinship Website: Ms. Jackson stated that in an effort to reach the larger community, a Kinship Care Services website has been created and is accessible at <http://www.dcfs.co.la.ca.us>.

Permanency Report Update: Trish Ploehn, Deputy DCFS, announced that Diane Wagner has been appointed as the Division Chief for Adoptions, Tiffany Collins, Program Manager for P3 and Nancy Chess who is now taking the leadership role for the implementation of concurrent planning. Ms. Ploehn provided the Commission with a reminder of the barriers toward permanency for foster youth age 14 and older that were identified in Dr. Sharon Watson's permanency report. Some of those barriers include sequential planning, lack of prioritization, and preconceived notions about permanency options for this population. The report included recommendations for how DCFS could become successful in providing older youth with legal permanency.

One specific recommendation, which was implemented by the Department, was the "Cold Case Concept". This concept was actualized through the implementation of the Permanency Partners Program (P3) pilot in October 2004. P3 is a public/private partnership between the Department and the Consortium for Children. The program began by identifying 50 youth who have been in foster care for at least 24 months, are 12-18 years of age and have no plan for legal permanency. Thirty-three youth have been connected to a permanency partner. The partner and the youth work together to identify significant others, relationships, family members in their lives that are willing to provide a legal permanent relationship. Since the implementation of the program, 10 cases have been completed with a plan of adoption, legal guardianship or a home has been identified. Ms. Ploehn shared specific stories to highlight how the process works and program successes and failures. Ms. Ploehn shared that the most difficult aspect of the program is not making the connections, but is in actuality supporting the connections once they have been made. Services must be engaged immediately as even short delays can be a catalyst for crisis.

Ms. Ploehn indicated that there is the potential of continuing the pilot for a longer period of time and that the Department is in discussions with the Consortium for Children. Additionally, retirees are being hired to create an internal P3 program. To date, 22 retirees have been hired and the remaining 22 should be hired within the next month. The retirees will be assigned to eight offices

and training has been planned for both the retirees and the staff within those eight offices. The Department is exploring the development of a replication pilot with a local community partner that is already working with this population. A Permanency Workgroup will be convening in April with the goal of developing an office by office plan to achieve permanency for those youth 12 years and older. Finally, there is a plan to put P3 out to bid for FY 2005-06.

Vice Chair Biondi asked if any of the kids have been in the probation system. Tiffany Collins responded in the affirmative. Vice Chair Biondi asked that this information is captured as the jurisdiction of these youth is beginning to merge. Finally she suggested that the Department begin to capture the process by which P3 works and the outcomes of the program so that when approaching funding agencies they have the evidence that the program is successful.

Due to time constraints, Nancy Chess was invited back to provide the Commission with her presentation on concurrent planning.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no request for public comment.

MEETING ADJOURNED